

DRAFT

Peck Ranch Conservation

Area

Fifteen-Year Area Management Plan

FY2015-FY2029



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OVERVIEW

- **Official Area Name:** Peck Ranch Conservation Area, #5203
- **Year of Initial Acquisition:** 1945
- **Acreage:** 23,763 acres
- **County:** Carter, Shannon
- **Division with Administrative Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Division with Maintenance Responsibility:** Wildlife
- **Statement of Primary Purpose:**

A. Strategic Direction

The primary purpose of the Peck Ranch Conservation Area (Peck Ranch) is to maintain, enhance, and restore native plant and animal communities, and to provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities for the public. Implementation and oversight of this plan will be carried out by the Peck Ranch Planning Team and Division representatives, who will meet on an annual basis.

B. Desired Future Condition

The desired future condition for the Peck Ranch is high quality natural communities, with a focus on natural resource management that provides opportunities for low impact, diverse public use.

C. Federal Aid Statement

This area, or a portion thereof, was acquired with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds to restore and manage wildlife, conserve and restore suitable wildlife habitat and provide public access for hunting or other wildlife-oriented recreation.

GENERAL INFORMATION AND CONDITIONS

I. Special Considerations

- A. **Priority Areas:** Peck Ranch is roughly bisected by the Current River Hills and Eleven Point Hills Conservation Opportunity Areas. It is also considered a priority landscape for the Missouri Forest Action Plan. Peck Ranch is on the southern boundary of the Elk Restoration Zone (Figure 1), which covers portions of Carter, Reynolds and Shannon Counties.
- B. **Natural Areas:** There are four designated Natural Areas on Peck Ranch: Stegall Mountain Natural Area (Igneous glade/woodland/forest/stream landscape), Mule Hollow Natural Area (Dolomite glade/Woodland complex), Golden Seal Natural Area (Mesic Dolomite Forest) and Grassy Pond Natural Area (Sinkhole Pond) (Figure 2). All are outstanding examples of these natural features within the Current River Hills Conservation Opportunity Area.

C. Peck Ranch Wildlife Refuge, Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project, MidcoPine Restoration Area and other research sites.

The Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project, or MOFEP, is one of the most comprehensive ecological investigations of forest response ever undertaken in upland oak ecosystems. Initiated in 1991, MOFEP includes coordinated research studies examining even-age, uneven-age and no-harvest forest management effects on vegetation dynamics, down wood, fungi, mast, birds, small mammals, herpetofauna, invertebrates and genetics. Soil, geological landforms, ecological land types and climate at the sites have also been studied. The project is designed to continue through one or more forest rotations for more than 100 years. MOFEP Sites 7 (1,240 acres) and 8 (840 acres) are located in the southwest corner of Peck Ranch; Site 9 (1,140 ac) is located in the northeast corner (Figure 3). These areas will continue to be managed consistent with the MOFEP experimental design and techniques.

Midco Shortleaf Pine Restoration Area is 2,233 acres, located in the south-central portion of Peck Ranch (Figure 3). The purpose of the area is to ensure native Shortleaf Pine and associated communities are retained on suitable sites. There is a research and monitoring study currently associated with this area. This is a management evaluation designed to work within operational plans and adapt to management needs. As such, Forestry, Wildlife and Resource Science Divisions will continue to evaluate the need and direction for any further monitoring or management that is not already consistent with the overall area plan.

Numerous other studies through the Missouri Department of Conservation (the Department) and partner organizations frequently use portions of Peck Ranch for additional research. Research will be conducted, as in the past, by working with area managers and other applicable Department staff to ensure appropriate use and permits are maintained.

D. Elk Restoration Project: In July 2010, the Conservation Commission directed the Department to re-initiate development of elk restoration. A thorough review of the entire state was conducted which included public opinion polls; habitat analysis; and relative distance to populations, row crops and other agriculture. Peck Ranch was identified as the best site for reintroduction of elk into the state. In the spring of 2011 the first group of elk arrived and was released onto the area. Reintroduction efforts continued until the spring of 2013 when the last elk from Kentucky was released. Today, research is still being conducted on the newly established elk herd in cooperation with the University of Missouri.

II. Important Natural Features and Resources

- A. **Species of Conservation Concern:** Species of conservation concern are known from this area. Area Managers should consult the Natural Heritage Database annually and review all management activities with the Natural History Biologist.
- B. **Caves:** Cave records are kept with the Department's Natural History Biologist. Managers should follow the Cave Management policy found in the Department Resource Policy Manual. All caves on this and other Conservation Areas are closed or restricted to public access. The fungus that causes White-nose Syndrome in bats has been documented in Missouri, resulting in the Department's *White-nose Syndrome Action Plan* that limits public access to protect bats.
- C. **Springs:** No survey of the size or location of springs exists; however, several small springs are located throughout Peck Ranch. The most notable spring is Mud Spring, in the Rogers Creek Watershed. While all of these springs are small, their presence is vitally important to the aquatic community of Peck Ranch. They help maintain water flow and constant water temperature to several small drainages.
- D. **Other:**
 - The Stegall Mountain Natural Area of Peck Ranch features a series of igneous glades that host Missouri species of conservation concern.
 - The central portion of Peck Ranch features high quality dolomite glade and fen complexes. The fen areas are distinguished by shallow soils with groundwater flow forming ooze areas and spring rivulets.
 - Peck Ranch includes almost 7 miles of the headwaters of Rogers Creek (designated as the seventh Missouri natural area in 1971 and since added to the Stegall Mountain Natural Area). This is one of the best examples of a high-quality intact Ozark warm-water headwater stream in the region. There have been four surveys of the fish fauna on Rogers Creek. Twenty-five species of fish are known from the creek.
 - An important feature in the southern portion of Peck Ranch is the Fox Pond shrub swamp. Shrub swamps are characterized by soils that are poorly drained and have surface water present for a significant portion of each year. Soils are usually deep in these areas and often have a mucky character. These areas are quite rare in Missouri, with only a few occurrences known in the Lower Ozark Section.
 - Ecological land types for the conservation area have been delineated in the *Missouri Atlas of Ecoregions* (Nigh & Schroeder, 2002) (Figure 4).

III. Existing Infrastructure

- 5 primitive campgrounds
- 1 25-100-yard shooting range

- 1 3D and static archery range (Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible); shooting tower
- 1 fire tower (Stegall Mountain Fire Tower)
- 3 deer/turkey hunting blinds (ADA accessible)
- 5 parking lots (1 ADA accessible at Headquarters lot)
- 5 privies (3 ADA accessible at Possum Hollow, Little Pine and Pine Loop campgrounds)
- 2 hiking trails
 - 0.5 miles - Viewing deck/Tower Beaver Pond Nature Trail
 - 11 miles - Ozark Trail
- 7 buildings
- 4 pond dams
- 55 miles of roads

IV. **Area Restrictions or Limitations**

- A. Deed Restrictions or Ownership Considerations:** Deed #181 – Designates Department ownership of 19,751 acres at Peck Ranch, except for highway right of way and 1.06 acres deeded to Carter County School District #3. Deed #181F – Describes Department purchase of 355.93 acres from T.J. Moss Tie Company with land access easements. Deed #181S – Describes the Department purchase of 40 acres from William O. and Mary Louise Price and grants them road easement.
- B. Federal Interest:** Uses of land acquired with federal funds may not interfere with the purpose for which it was acquired. Federal funds may also be used in the management of this land. Fish and wildlife agencies may not allow recreational activities and related facilities that would interfere with the purpose for which the State is managing the land. Other uses may be acceptable and must be assessed in each specific situation.
- C. Easements:** There is a telephone easement, issued Sept. 19, 1979, to the Carter County Telephone Company: In the Peck Ranch Wildlife Area, 6 feet wide, originating at the eastern boundary of Peck Ranch and extending westerly for approximately 6 miles, along and adjacent to the main road, terminating at the Area Headquarters.
- D. Cultural Resources Findings:** Peck Ranch is rich in cultural resources. These include the Mill Creek Schoolhouse site, old iron ore pits, tramways and house sites. Records for cultural resources are kept with the Department Environmental Compliance Specialist. Managers should follow Best Management Practices for Cultural Resources found in the Department Resource Policy Manual. Cultural surveys are completed prior to any earth moving projects when needed.
- E. Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** None observed.

F. Endangered Species: Endangered Species are not known from this site, but are found in the surrounding area. Area managers should consult annually with the Natural History Biologist.

G. Boundary Issues: None

H. Other: Special regulations apply to all conservations areas. See Chapter 11 of *The Wildlife Code of Missouri* and MDC online Atlas Database.

MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

V. Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Continue to enhance and restore high quality natural communities.
- 2) Prevent the loss of native diversity due to invasive/exotic plant and animal species.
- 3) Successfully maintain habitat that supports elk restoration and sustains associated fish and wildlife species.
- 4) Engage conservation partners who can help achieve terrestrial resource management across a larger contiguous landscape.

Management Objective 1: Maintain and enhance glades and woodland communities to reduce woody species encroachment and increase the species richness and cover of native ground flora, as described in *The Terrestrial Natural Communities of Missouri* (Nelson, 2010).

Strategy 1: Use prescribed fire, altering frequency, season and intensity of burns, based on plant community and wildlife response to fire and historical fire frequencies. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Use mechanical/chemical means to reduce woody species coverage where necessary. (Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 3: Control invasive plants and animals. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Evaluate forestry and wildlife research data (MOFEP, Midco Pine Restoration Project, Elk project data including movement, habitat use, etc.) to facilitate land management decisions. (Wildlife/Forestry)

Strategy 5: Conduct forest inventory based on the inventory schedule for woodland communities to evaluate the health of the wooded component. Implement woodland management prescriptions based on the forest inventory and the condition of the woodland natural community (Forestry/Wildlife).

Strategy 6: Meet or exceed best management practices as outlined in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014) on all woodland management, with considerations for aesthetics and viewsheds. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 7: Control and monitor for insect and disease outbreaks that pose a threat to the health and character of woodland communities, or that cause unsafe conditions for public users. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Maintain, enhance and restore diverse, well-developed forest communities.

Strategy 1: Maintain forest inventory schedule. (Forestry)

Strategy 2: Implement forest management prescriptions based on forest inventory. (Forestry)

Strategy 3: Control exotic plants and animals. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Control and monitor for insect and disease outbreaks that pose a threat to the health and character of forest communities, or that cause unsafe conditions for public users. (Forestry)

Strategy 5: Meet or exceed best management practices as outlined in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014) on all forest management, with considerations for aesthetics and viewsheds. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Strategy 6: Evaluate forestry and wildlife research data (e.g., from MOFEP, Midco Pine Restoration Project, and the Department's Elk project data) to facilitate land management decisions. (Forestry/Wildlife)

Management Objective 3: Maintain, enhance, and restore a minimum of 600 acres of grasslands, which include a mix of warm- and cool-season grasses, forbs and small grain.

Strategy 1: Use management tools, such as mechanical, chemical and fire, to clear old fields and/or food plots. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Use management practices that maintain and improve soil quality through the use of cover crops and planned crop rotation.

Strategy 3: Control invasive plants and animals. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Evaluate forestry and wildlife research data (movement, habitat use, etc.) to facilitate land management decisions. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 4: Maintain, enhance and restore special natural features, including caves and fens.

Strategy 1: Evaluate woody encroachment and cut and treat invading woody species, as needed, in fens, and at Grassy Pond Natural Area and Fox Shrub Swamp. Implement prescribed fire where possible. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Control invasive plants and animals. (Wildlife)

VI. Aquatic Resource Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Reduce sedimentation by protecting and establishing riparian corridors, and repairing and/or redesigning failing stream crossings.
- 2) Maintain and create fishless ponds.

Management Objective 1: Enhance the riparian corridor along Rogers and Mill Creek tributaries, including springs, seeps, fens, and other unique communities associated with bottomland forests. Protect from erosion and irreversible damage. (Fisheries)

Strategy 1: Minimize sedimentation in Rogers Creek and its tributaries resulting from incompatible land management practices and/or road systems by following practices recommended in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014). (Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Maintain a riparian corridor with a minimum of 100 feet from the top of the bank on each side for third-order streams and larger (i.e., Rogers and Mill Creeks), as documented in the Department's *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (2009). (Fisheries)

Strategy 3: Maintain a riparian corridor with a minimum of 50 feet from the top of the bank on each side for stream orders one and two (i.e., tributaries of Roger and Mill Creek drainages), as documented in *Watershed and Stream Management Guidelines* (Missouri Department of Conservation, 2009). (Fisheries)

Management Objective 2: Design and maintain appropriate stream crossings to allow access, while minimizing impact to aquatic communities.

Strategy 1: Evaluate stream crossings, as concerns arise, and apply practices outlined in the Department's *Missouri Watershed Protection Practice Recommended Practices for Missouri Forests* (2014). (Fisheries/Design and Development)

Management Objective 3: Maintain and create fishless ponds as habitat for amphibians and reptiles, and as a source of water for other wildlife. (Fisheries)

Strategy 1: Build fishless ponds, where appropriate, in conjunction with future forest management practices, when equipment is on-site by FY21. (Fisheries)

Strategy 2: Control woody vegetation on fishless pond dams. (Fisheries)

VII. Public Use Management Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Provide elk viewing opportunities.
- 2) Maintain management goals while meeting public demands.

Management Objective 1: Provide and manage for limited-access recreation, compatible with natural community management and other uses by Special Use Permit. (Wildlife)

Strategy 1: Maintain or improve existing section of Ozark Trail through partnerships. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Maintain statewide hunting and public use regulations for the area outside of the fenced or signed refuge portion and special use regulations inside. (Wildlife/Protection)

Strategy 3: Maintain existing shooting and archery ranges. (Wildlife)

Strategy 4: Maintain existing primitive campground units and restroom facilities. (Wildlife)

Strategy 5: Maintain, improve, or alter existing roads and hiking trails as needed to maintain their usability and to prevent erosion. (Wildlife/Fisheries/Forestry/Design and Development)

Strategy 6: Continue the use of managed hunts as a wildlife population management tool and to provide recreational opportunities. (Wildlife)

Strategy 7: Provide recreational use by hikers, photographers, horseback riders, hunters, bird watchers and other user groups, consistent with the Department's Public Use Policy and *The Wildlife Code of Missouri*. (Wildlife)

Management Objective 2: Provide safe elk viewing opportunities while maintaining quality wildlife habitat.

Strategy 1: Evaluate elk research data (movement, habitat use, etc.) to facilitate public use without compromising herd health. (Wildlife)

Strategy 2: Explore interpretive opportunities such as signage, print materials and radio guided tours. (Wildlife/Forestry/Outreach and Education)

VIII. Administrative Considerations

Challenges and Opportunities:

- 1) Maintain roads according to schedule.
- 2) Maintain infrastructure with increased public use.
- 3) Provide accommodations for Department staff, researchers, etc.

Management Objective 1: Coordinate road maintenance to best fit resource management needs, to reduce erosion and accommodate public use.

Strategy 1: Annually prioritize road maintenance.

(Wildlife/Forestry/Fisheries/Design and Development)

Strategy 2: Annually evaluate public access to balance public use and resource needs. (Wildlife/Forestry/Fisheries/Design and Development)

MANAGEMENT TIMETABLE

Strategies are considered ongoing unless listed in the following table:

	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
Terrestrial Resources Management											
<i>Objective 1: Maintain and Enhance Glades and Woodland Communities</i>											
Strategy 4	X	X	X								
<i>Objective 2: Maintain, Enhance and Restore Forests</i>											
Strategy 6	X	X	X								
<i>Objective 3: Maintain, Enhance and Restore Open Land</i>											
Strategy 1	X	X									
Strategy 4	X	X	X								
Public Use Management Considerations											
<i>Objective 2: Provide Safe and Meaningful Elk Viewing Opportunities</i>											
Strategy 1	X	X	X								
Strategy 2	X	X	X								

APPENDICES

Area Background:

Peck Ranch Conservation Area is in northwest Carter County and eastern Shannon County, north of Fremont, Missouri. The area consists of 23,763 acres of rugged, forested hills and hollows. Limestone and rhyolite glades provide natural openings among the oak-pine forest that dominates the region. Narrow ridges range from 900 to 1,000 feet in elevation. The area's highest point is Stegall Mountain, 1,348 feet above sea level. Rogers Creek and Mill Creek, which flow into the Current River, meander through the area.

Peck Ranch began as the dream of a wealthy Chicago businessman. After acquiring 19,000 acres along Mill and Rogers creeks, George Peck and other investors established the Mid-Continent Iron Company. Peck's dream included clearcutting Peck Ranch to supply the 100 cords of fuel per day needed to fire the smelter's blast furnaces. He employed 200 families and installed his own teams to haul cordwood. The company town which sprang up around the smelter became known as Midco.

During World War I, the area continued to boom. The U.S. Government spent \$3.5 million to install a wood alcohol distillery at Midco to be used in making ammunition. This period of prosperity was brief. The low-grade iron-ore mill at Midco folded after the end of the war and a flu epidemic ravaged the Ozarks. George Peck returned to Chicago and the workers who remained in the area tried to eke out a living on the abused land.

When prohibition ended, the demand for white oak barrels surged. Griffith Stave Company bought the remaining timber rights on Peck Ranch and revived the area's timber industry. The boom was short-lived, and Peck Ranch was once again for sale.

In 1945, the Department purchased Peck Ranch for wild turkey management. Today, diverse management techniques, including prescribed fire and forest products harvesting methods, are used to maintain and restore the many natural communities on Peck Ranch.

This conservation area was acquired in part through the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Acquisition History:

Year	Acres and Funding Source
1945	19,751 acres (Department funds)
1952	3,097 acres Pittman-Robertson funds; Department funds)
1981	180 acres (1/8 of 1% sales tax "Design for Conservation" funds)
1995	160 acres (1/8 of 1% sales tax "Design for Conservation" funds)
2013	715 acres (Department funds)

Current Land/Water Types:

Land/Water Type	Acres	Feet	% of Area
Woodland	16,328		69
Upland Forest	6,509		27
Glade	752		3
Warm Season Grass Fields	122		<1
Old Fields/Upland Fields	41.3		<1
Impounded Water	1.7		<1
Total	23,763		100%
Stream Frontage		70,348	

Public Input Summary:

Prior to writing this area management plan, the Department received public input (the Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage) from May 1–31, 2014. The objective of this phase was to inform stakeholders about the area planning process and ask them to share ideas.

The public was notified in the following ways:

- Through signs and business cards displayed/distributed at the Twin Pines Nature Center, Ozark National Scenic Riverways Headquarters, Missouri Department of Conservation Van Buren Forestry Office, Peck Ranch Conservation Area field office and announced at all public events.
- Information and online comment form available at <mdc.mo.gov/areaplans>;
- News release sent to local media outlets;
- Letters or emails sent to neighboring landowners, neighborhood associations, National Wild Turkey Federation representatives, Quality Deer Management Association, The Nature Conservancy, Wild Horse League, Van Buren Chamber of Commerce, National Park Service – Ozark National Scenic Riverways, U.S. Forest Service – Eleven Point District, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Pioneer Forest, L-A-D Foundation, Missouri Forest Products Association and Missouri Society of American Foresters.

The Missouri Department of Conservation received input from 59 respondents (see “Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage Public Input Summary” at <http://mdc.mo.gov/node/27589>). The area management planning team took comments into consideration as they drafted this 15-year management plan for Peck Ranch Conservation Area. A brief summary of public input themes, including how they will be incorporated or why they will not be included, can be found in Appendix A.

References:

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2009). *Watershed and stream management guidelines for lands and waters managed by Missouri Department of Conservation*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Missouri Department of Conservation. (2014). *Missouri watershed protection practice recommended practices for Missouri forests: 2014 management guidelines for maintaining forested watersheds to protect streams*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Conservation Commission of the State of Missouri.

Nelson, P. (2010). *The terrestrial natural communities of Missouri*. Jefferson City, Missouri: Missouri Natural Areas Committee.

Nigh, T. A., & Schroeder, W. A. (2002). *Atlas of Missouri ecoregions*. Missouri: Missouri Department of Conservation.

Maps:

Figure 1: Elk Restoration Zone

Figure 2: Area Map of Peck Ranch Conservation Area

Figure 3: Research Areas at Peck Ranch Conservation Areas

Figure 4: Ecological Land Types

Figure 5: Forestry Compartment Map

Figure 6: Adjacent Public Lands

Additional Appendices:

Appendix A: Department Responses to Public Comments – Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage

Figure 1: Elk Restoration Zone

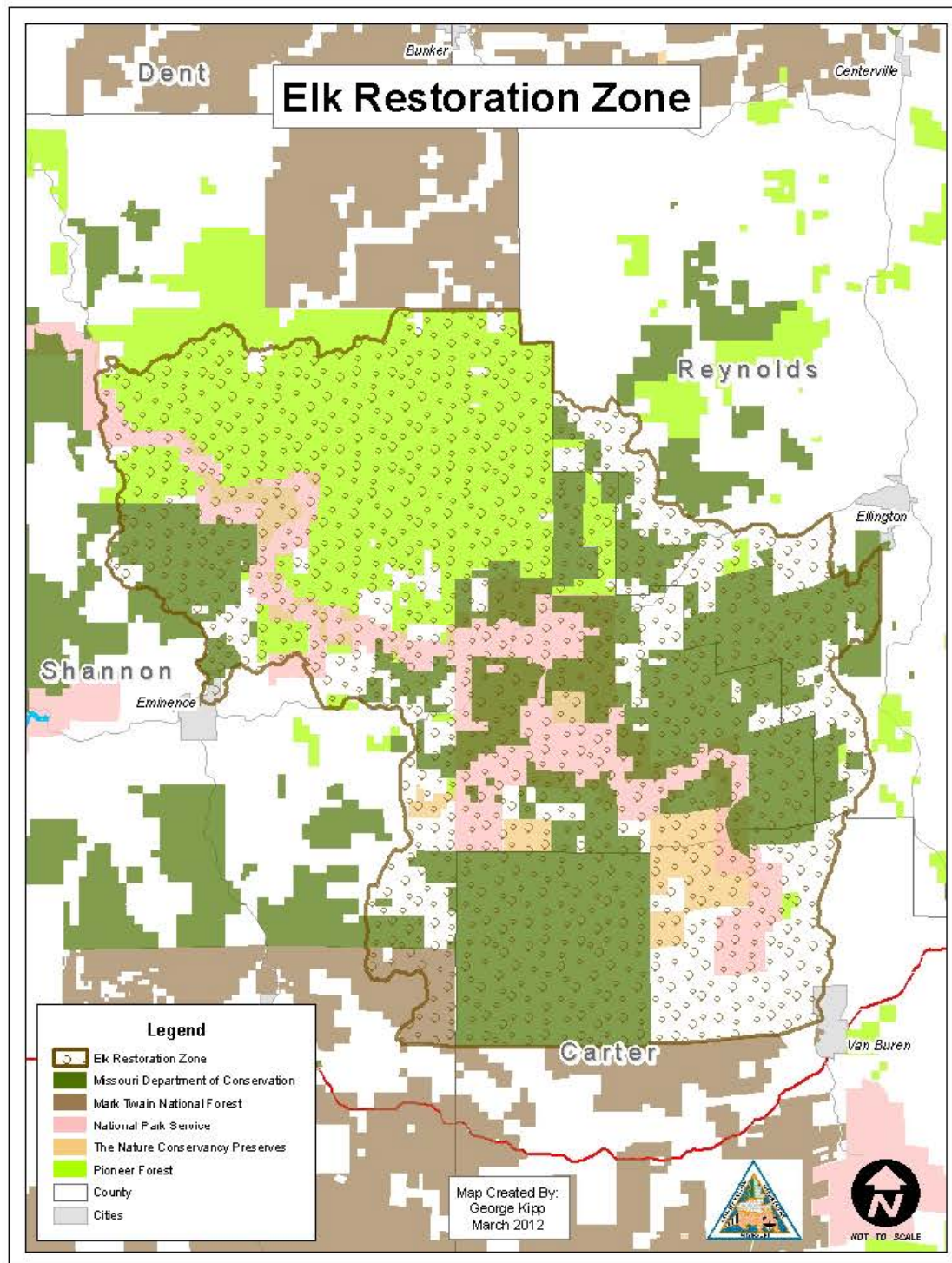


Figure 2: Area Map of Peck Ranch Conservation Area

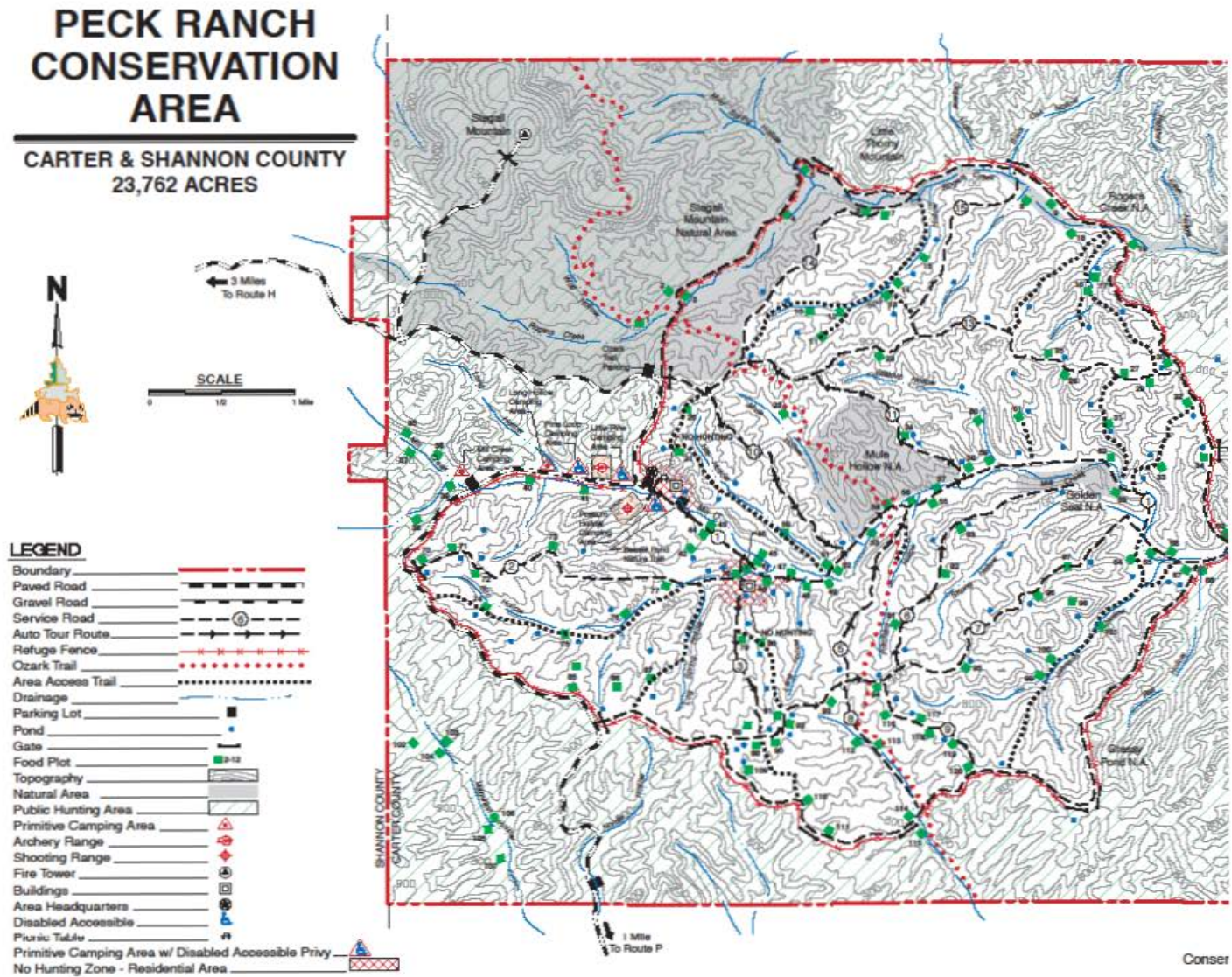


Figure 3: Research Areas at Peck Ranch Conservation Area

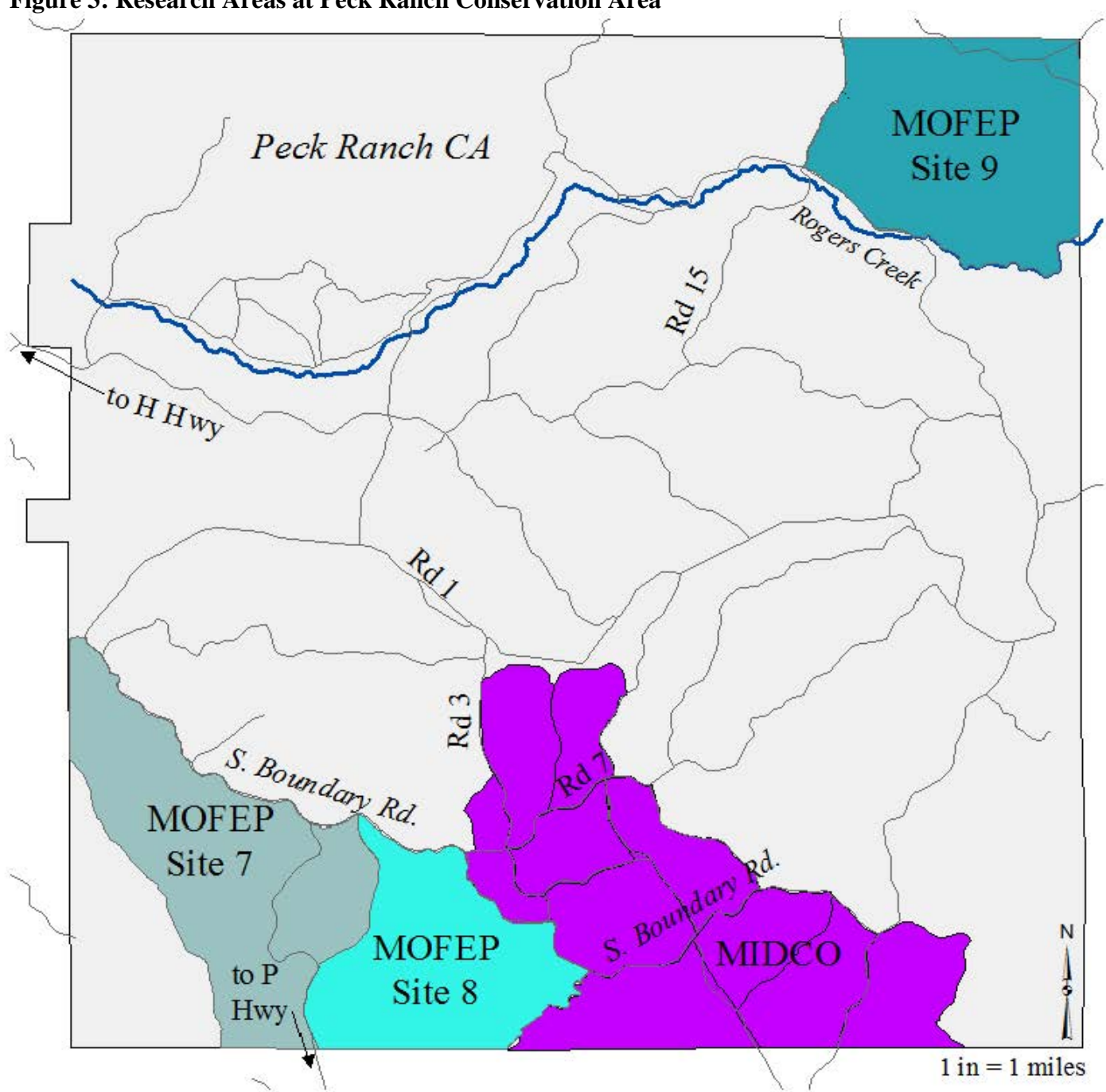


Figure 4: Ecological Land Types

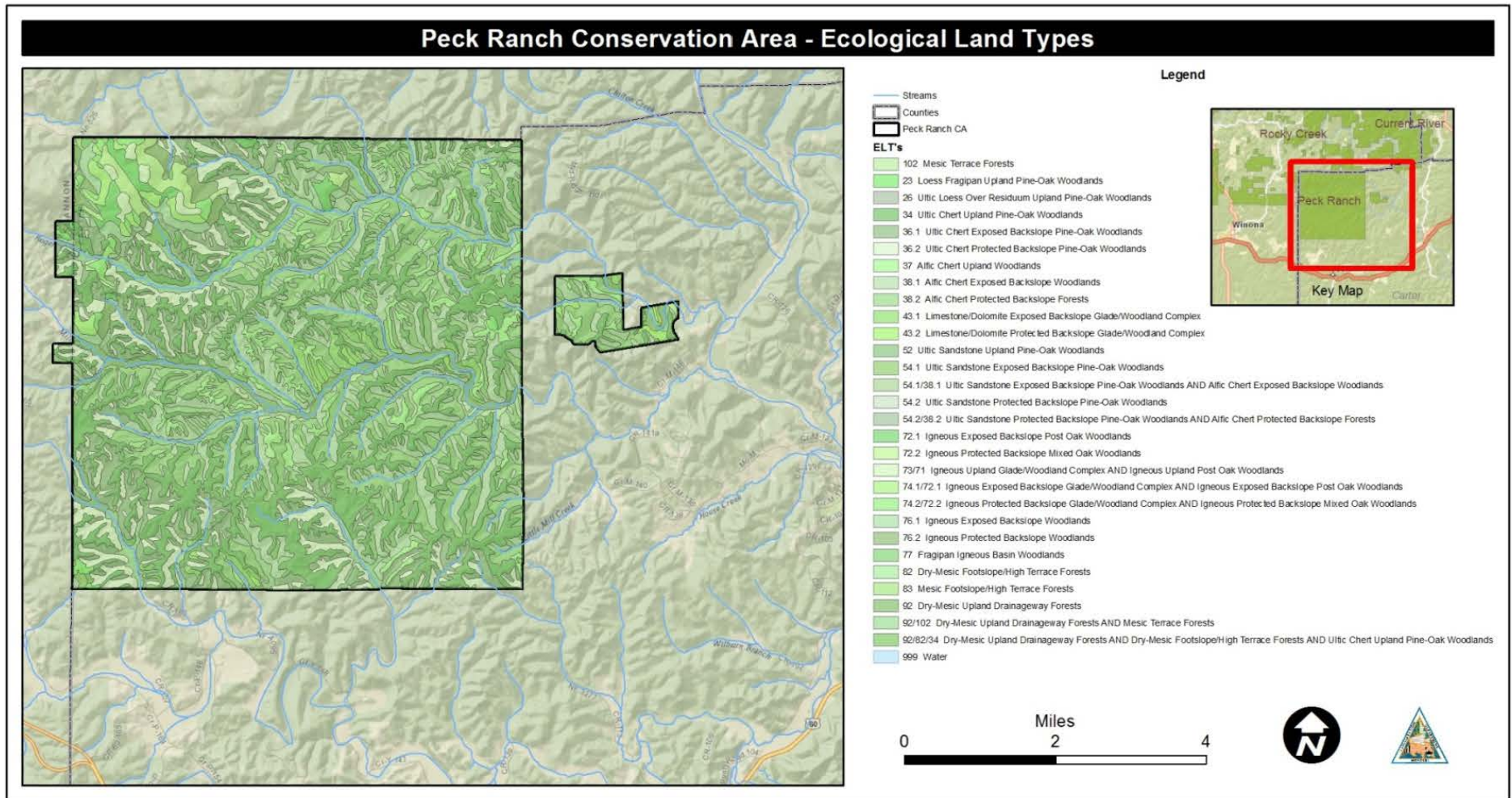


Figure 5: Forestry Compartment Map

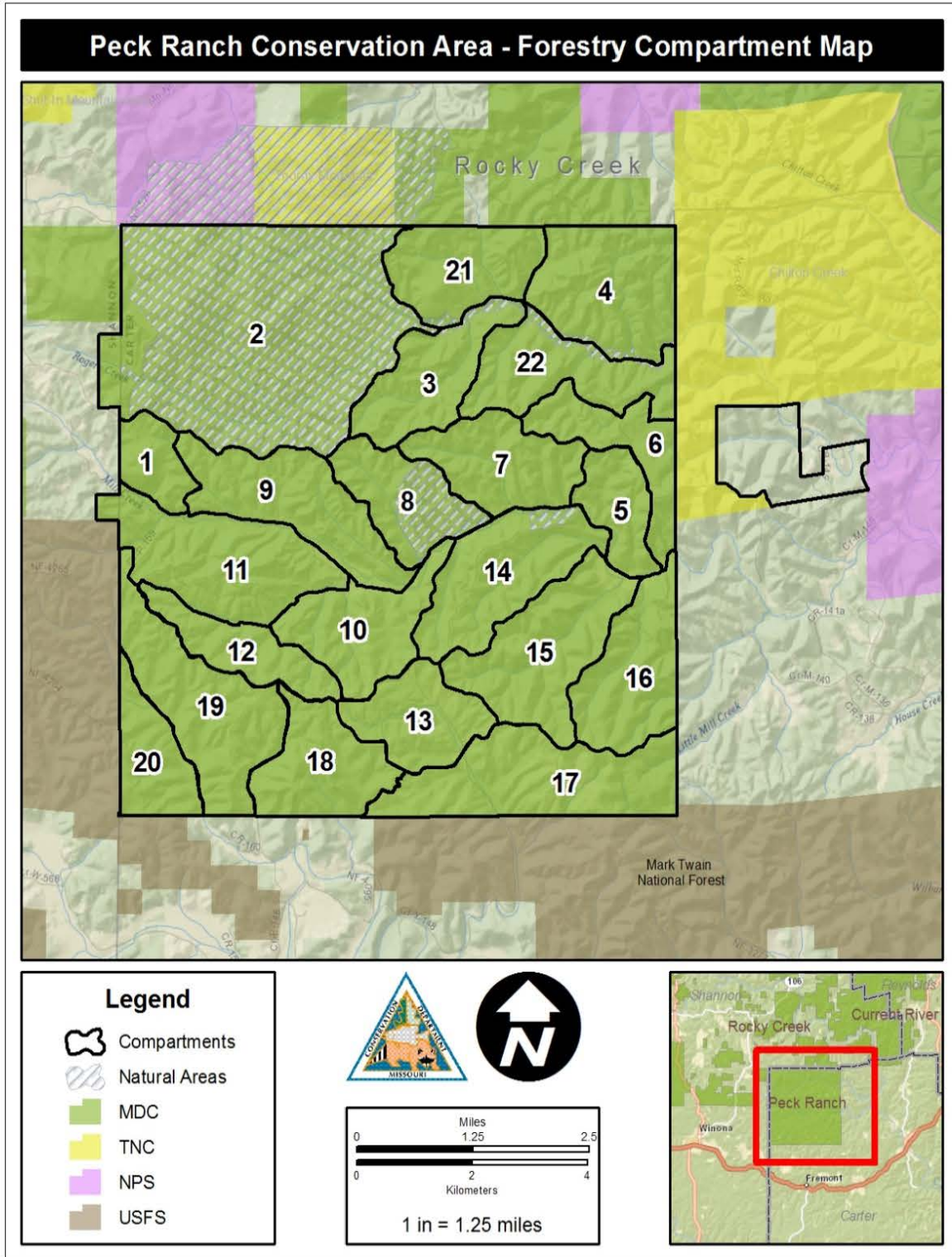
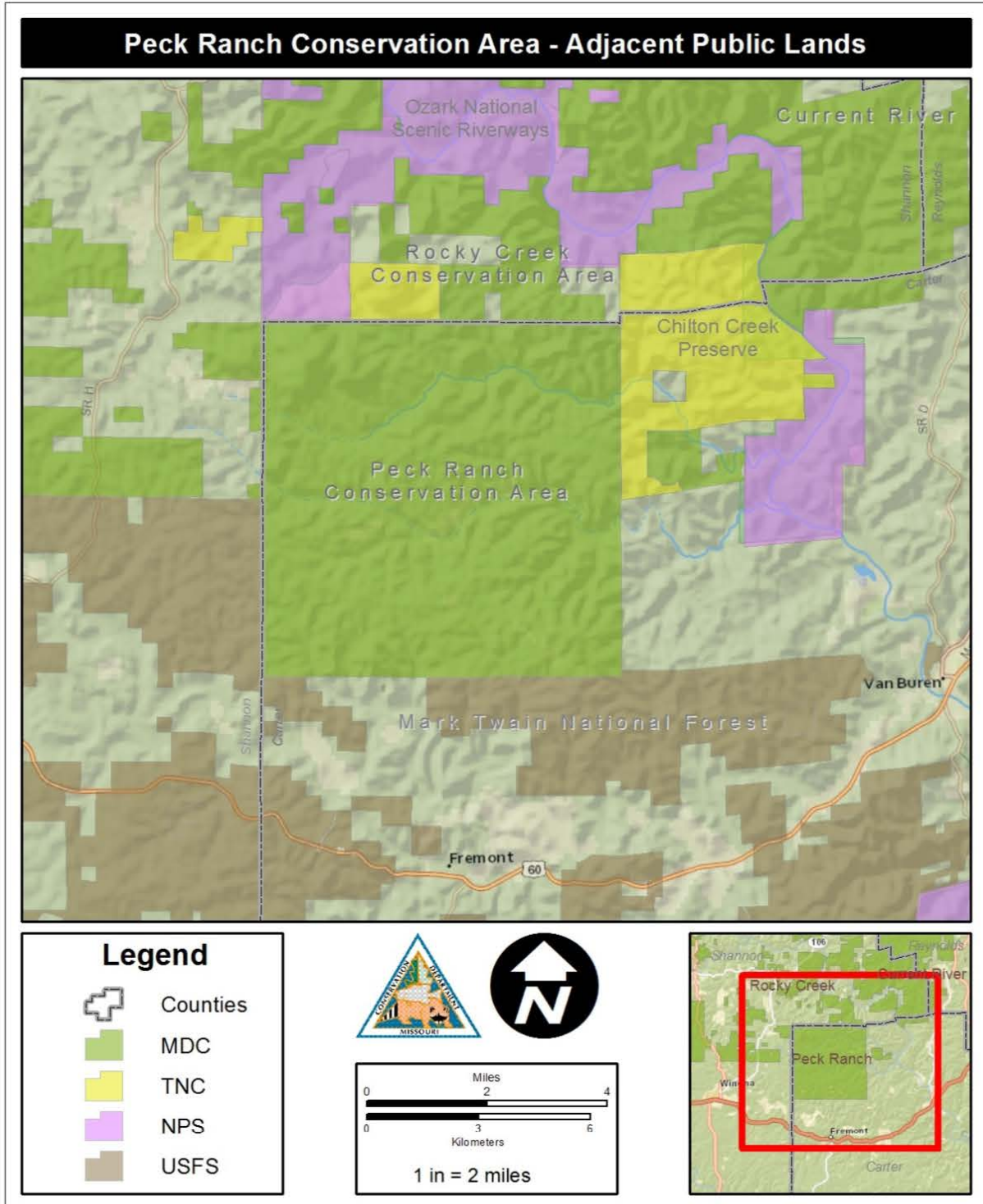


Figure 6: Adjacent Public Lands



Appendix A: Department Responses to Public Comments – Peck Ranch Conservation Area Idea Gathering Stage

Terrestrial Resources Management

Supports continuing prescribed fire and restoration of open woodlands, savannas and glades.

The management team agrees with the use of prescribed fire as a tool for restoration of our natural communities on Peck Ranch. We plan to continue the use of this tool as well as other restoration techniques, as stated under Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations Objective 1-Strategy 1 and -Strategy 2).

Opposes most growing season burns because of negative impact to turkeys.

The management team has set objectives for prescribed fire that are “based on plant community and wildlife response to fire and historical fire frequencies” (Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations Objective 1-Strategy 1). We also think that management must be based on scientific principles that “facilitate land management decisions” (Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations Objective 1-Strategy 4). Our goal is to restore the natural communities within Peck Ranch, while limiting any negative impact to wildlife diversity (including eastern wild turkeys).

Supports additional food plots (including alfalfa and other forages) to help retain elk on area and to promote turkey, deer and elk.

The management team agrees that we should continue to provide optimal forage in the existing open land on Peck Ranch, as stated under Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations Objective 1-Strategy 1. We will continue to work with and monitor the open lands, along with Resource Science Division to develop an open lands plan that will support the growing elk population, as well as provide forage for existing deer and turkey populations.

Supports continuing Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystem Project (MOFEP) on Peck Ranch.

The management team agrees that we should support long-term research efforts of MOFEP. The Peck Ranch managers take a science-based approach to management of its natural resources. MOFEP is an important part of the research that goes on within the boundaries of Peck Ranch (Terrestrial Resource Management Considerations Management Objective 1-Strategy 4 and Management Objective 2-Strategy 6).

Supports logging for management purposes; opposes logging for revenue purposes.

Terrestrial Resource Management Objective 1 and Objective 2 state, “Maintain and enhance glades and woodland communities to reduce woody species encroachment and increase species richness and cover of native ground flora,” and to “Maintain, enhance and restore diverse, well-

developed forest communities.” Each of the objectives relies on strategies that include logging as a tool that can be used to meet management objectives to realize desired natural community conditions. The management team agrees that we should use this tool as a way to meet our management objectives with the product of having a well-developed natural community, while providing socio-economic benefits to the local community.

Supports continuing to manage Peck Ranch primarily for wildlife and natural community restoration.

The management team agrees with this statement and will continue to manage Peck Ranch for its natural communities and wildlife. Our team believes that each objective and strategy listed under Terrestrial Resource Management will support our wildlife needs and develop healthy diverse natural communities.

Public Use Management

Trails

Concern about closure of Ozark Trail through Peck Ranch from April-July

Currently the conservation area provides miles of Ozark trail that are open year-round. One of the Terrestrial Resource challenges stated in this plan is to “Successfully restore elk and associated wildlife.” Our goal for elk restoration is to have a viable elk population within the Elk Restoration Zone. The Department started this restoration project in 2010. The first three-year phase of elk reintroduction has been completed; we are now in the Elk Management phase. Currently, our research shows that we need to grow our population of elk; therefore, we are taking as much precaution as we can to allow for successful reproduction during the spring months. We will continue to rely heavily on our elk research to determine a time when we can again utilize the Ozark Trail during the April-July season.

Suggests providing alternative routes for mountain bikes using the Ozark Trail to take around the Peck Ranch refuge.

The management team agrees that we should allow for different types of recreational use. Public Use Management Considerations Objective 1 states to “Provide and manage for limited-access recreation, compatible with natural community management and other uses.” Although the portion of the Ozark Trail is not open to mountain biking, Peck Ranch consists of 31 miles of maintained roads. These roads can be used for hiking, auto use, bicycles and horses, and allow for various outdoor experiences.

Suggests adding designated equestrian trails to Peck Ranch.

The management team agrees that we should allow for different types of recreational use. Public Use Management Considerations Objective 1 states to “Provide and manage for limited-access recreation, compatible with natural community management and other uses.” Peck Ranch consists of 31 miles of maintained roads. These roads can be used for hiking, auto use, bicycles and horses, and allow for various outdoor experiences. Some commenters requested allowing horseback riding on the Ozark Trail portions of Peck Ranch (or parallel portions). Horseback riding is currently not allowed on any of the Ozark Trail sections adjoining Peck Ranch. The Ozark Trail portions of Peck Ranch also transverse two Missouri Natural Areas (areas designated for particularly important natural features). Many sensitive resources occur along these stretches of the Ozark Trail, including a high-priority creek and igneous and dolomite glades. To protect these resources, horseback riding is limited to the 31 miles of public roads on the area.

Opposes equestrian use on Peck Ranch.

The management team agrees that we should allow for different types of recreational use. Public Use Management Considerations Objective 1 states to “Provide and manage for limited-access recreation, compatible with natural community management and other uses. Peck Ranch consists of 31 miles of maintained roads. These trails can be used for hiking, auto use, bicycles and horses, and allow for various outdoor experiences.

Opposes off-road all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use on Peck Ranch

The management team supports the statement that no ATV should be allowed off road. Current area regulations do not allow for ATVs to be used on Peck Ranch.

Amenities

Concern that there are fewer roads open for public access of deer hunting locations.

Peck Ranch consists of roughly 11,500 fenced-in “refuge” acres and 12,000 acres that are outside of the refuge and subject to statewide regulations. The refuge allows hunting during managed hunts only, but the area outside of the refuge allows hunting during statewide seasons. Peck Ranch has 31 miles of roads with an additional 30 miles of roads that are maintained and open during managed hunts. This does not include miles of logging haul roads that are open in certain portions of Peck Ranch.

Suggests adding an equestrian campground (including water, corrals and bathroom facilities).

Public Use Management Objective 1-Strategy 5 states to “Maintain existing primitive campground units and restroom facilities.” Currently there are no plans for additional infrastructure on Peck Ranch.

Hunting

Concern with illegal activities observed on area (e.g., deer drives with dogs, spotlighting activity). Suggest limiting access points to Peck Ranch and housing a manager on the area.

The Department has zero tolerance on illegal activities. The Department's Protection Division is committed to enforcing *The Wildlife Code of Missouri* on Peck Ranch. Public Use Management Considerations Objective 1-Strategy 3 states, "Maintain statewide regulations for the area outside of the fenced or signed portion and special regulations inside." This strategy is for compliance of all users within and outside the refuge portion. Since its inception, the Department has sought to balance public access with natural resource protection and enhancement at Peck Ranch. The Area provides limited housing for seasonal or intermediate employees. However, the Department's Policy does not allow for permanent housing on Peck Ranch. Citizens observing illegal activities should contact Operation Game Thief at 1-800-392-1111.

**To submit a comment on this document,
click on the following link:**

<http://mdc.mo.gov/node/19221?ap=5203>